

COVID-19 has killed dozens in Greater Lansing. They each have a name.

A tribute to those who died from coronavirus complications in Ingham County

By KYLE KAMINSKI

Dozens have died from coronavirus infections across Greater Lansing. Our staff has watched the case count and death toll climb across Ingham, Clinton and Eaton counties for several weeks. Some have suggested that we could be on the edge of another widespread outbreak.

Often lost in the statistics are the stories, names and faces of those who lost their battle with the disease. City Pulse searched sever-

al hundred death records filed since March to assemble a comprehensive list of COVID-19 victims in Ingham County. Each of these names list COVID-19 as a cause (or contributing cause) of death. They represent the very real human toll that COVID-19 has had on Mid-Michigan and beyond. Fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, friends, coworkers. This virus knows no bounds. This week, we remember and celebrate those lives, and pay tribute to those COVID-19 claimed.

Robert Lee Allen
10/9/48 -
3/31/20



Allen, 71, of Lansing, was a deacon at the Lansing Church of God in Christ and a former laborer at General Motors, according to his death certificate. Born in Winona, Mississippi, Allen was known for his faith in God and love for his family, sports, jazz music, helping others and perfecting his yard. He died at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing. Allen leaves behind a wife, two children, 10 grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren and many sisters, brothers and friends.

Virginia Ann Wiggins
10/11/43 - 4/2/20



Wiggins, 76, of Lansing, worked as a clerical worker at the Lansing Board of Water & Light and was known for her kind heart and deep involvement in the local community. City Pulse couldn't find an online obituary, and we couldn't reach her family, but some remembered her online.

Dan Segalman, a professor at Michigan State University, said Wiggins was a dedicated volunteer, which included work with the Lansing Branch of the NAACP, the Lansing Association of Women's Clubs and the Union Missionary Baptist Church. Others remembered her as a good friend, a god-mother or just a smiling face in the crowd with wisdom, faith and a generous heart.

"Virginia was the ultimate considerate, warm-hearted and helpful individual I had the good fortune to work with," a colleague remembered. "The world is a sadder place without her spirit."

Tracy Ann White
3/21/60 - 4/9/20

White, 60, of Lansing, died at McLaren Greater Lansing under the loving care of her family. Born in Benton Harbor to Willie and Neely (Gibson) Lacy Sr., death certificates also show that White worked as a logistics analyst before her death. Her funeral arrangements were in Grand Rapids. City Pulse couldn't locate an obituary for White or contact her family.

Mildred Mary Puckett
1/19/26 -
3/31/20



Puckett, 94, of Dewitt, was raised in a large German farm family in Westphalia. She later met her husband, Floyd, at a bowling alley in Arizona, where she threw a lot of gutter balls but went on to become somewhat of a bowling champion. Puckett later moved to Lansing during WWII to work at the GM Forge Plant making artillery shells — a genuine capital city "Rosie the Riveter."

Puckett later taught herself how to type and went to Lansing Community College to become a data coding operator, working for the state of Michigan for 15 years. She was a self-taught pianist, loved going to the movies and enjoyed gardening the many (many) flowers in her yard.

Gunnisonville Meadows Assisted Living was Puckett's home over the last several years. She is survived by her two sons, six grandchildren and three great grandchildren, among other family.

James Louis Shier
5/14/42 -
4/15/20



Shier, 77, of Lansing, served in both the U.S. Army and Marines and was known as a quiet and faithful man who took great pleasure in serving as an usher at St. Gerard Church in Lansing. Death records show that he worked as a truck driver. Friends and family will remember him as an earnest and honorable man who fought his last battle with an enemy that he could not conquer: a raging virus which stole his ability to breathe. He leaves behind his loving wife, Ruby, his brother, Larry Shier, and his sister, Alice Prior, and many nieces and nephews.

Michael Edward Debrowsky
11/10/53 - 4/29/20

Debrowsky, 66, of East Lansing, worked as a rig driver, according to his death certificate. City Pulse couldn't find an obituary or contact Debrowsky's surviving family.

Editor's Note:

The Ingham County Clerk's office houses death certificates, which are publicly available for any and all deaths that occur within Ingham County. They are not categorized by cause of death; Who requires a manual review of every individual certificate at the courthouse in Mason.

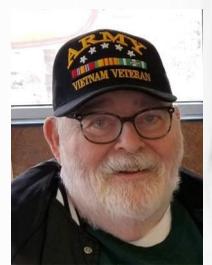
Those listed above are Ingham County deaths that clearly list COVID-19 as a cause or contributing cause of their death and a residency within Ingham, Clinton and Eaton counties. The list, by no means, is exhaustive. Additional deaths have been reported in Greater Lansing.

Several other deaths listed in records at the Clerk's Office were also attributed to COVID-19 complications, but didn't necessarily involve patients who were residents of Ingham County.

They were:

John Willie Worthey, of Oak Park; Scott Andrew Caughey, of Muskegon; Mary Frances Smith, of Detroit; William Rice Cooper, of Rochester; David Wayne Kurka, of Fairfield Township; Kelly R. Gregory, of Benton Township; Eithel Bernice Johnson, of Southgate; Ida Elizabeth Allen, of Mundy Township; Joshua Carrizales, of Grand Blanc Township; Stacy Jo Anthes, of Waterford Township; Dora Farene Andrews, of Lyons and Linda J. Matthews, of Elmwood Township.

Arthur William Kowalk
4/4/43 - 4/13/20



Kowalk, 77, of Lansing, attended Grand Ledge High School and served in the U.S. Army with tours in Vietnam in the early '60s. He later studied computer science at Lansing Community College before taking a job in the mailroom at Auto-Owners Insurance Co. in 1964 — slowly climbing the ranks for over 40 years and retiring as an assistant vice president in 2005.

Kowalk was an antique car enthusiast and member of the Capitol City Old Car Club. He also enjoyed playing golf and softball and loved coaching youth football and women's softball teams.

Kowalk is survived by his wife, Barbara, who said she took him to dialysis treatment more than 600 times before he contracted COVID-19 at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing. He's also survived by a daughter, two sons, a sister, two stepsons, nine grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

"He truly was, as they say, one foot in the grave for so long," Barbara Kowalk told City Pulse.

John William Fillion
2/2/41 - 4/12/20

Fillion, 79, of Meridian Township, worked as a laborer at General Motors. City Pulse couldn't locate an obituary for Fillion or reach family.

Charles Edward White

12/31/50 - 4/8/20

White, 69, of Lansing, was born in Stanton, Tennessee, married his high school sweetheart, Peggy, and went on to celebrate 50 years of marriage before his death.



After moving to Lansing, White took a job as a USPS mailman in 1970, later becoming a mechanic and retiring in 2011. White joined the Friendship House of Prayer Baptist Church in 2016. Those who knew him will remember his work ethic, his passion and his dependability. White enjoyed Sunday dinners with his family, barbecuing, decorating for the holidays, having bonfires with grandchildren, driving his 1966 Chevy truck, bowling, shopping with his wife and much more.

“We will always remember Uncle Charles’ brilliant smile, care and concern for Aunt Peggy and his children,” one relative posted in an online tribute from Paradise Funeral Chapel in Lansing.

Jesus M. Perez
2/2/27 - 4/9/20

Perez, 93, of Dewitt Township, was born in San Benito, Texas, and moved to Michigan as an adult. He worked various jobs before landing a gig at the General Motors Fisher Body Plant in Lansing, retiring in 1987 after 37 and a half years of service with UAW Local 602. He was also a military veteran, serving overseas in the Korean War before taking an honorable discharge.



Perez, an active member of St. Therese Parish in Lansing and the Boy Scouts of America, spent 63 years married to his wife, Odilla, before she died in 2018. Together, they raised five children. He’s survived by each of them, 11 grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, three sisters, three brothers and many nieces and nephews. Perez enjoyed dancing, family gatherings, gardening, camping, being outdoors in nature, GM retiree functions and tinkering with his tools.

Richard Llewelyn Hersey

3/21/36 - 4/15/20

Hersey, 84, of Dewitt Township, served in the U.S. Marine Corps and worked as an IBEW Local 665 electrician for more than 30 years. He was known to proudly point out the numerous buildings in Lansing that he had wired. In later years, he was part owner of Quality Electric. Hersey was also a long-time member of the Church of the Resurrection and the Catholic Community of St. Jude. He loved to garden and spend time in his yard, was a loyal MSU basketball and football fan and enjoyed his daily walks and chats with his neighbors. Friends and family, like his wife, Lucy, remembered Hersey as a generous, soft-spoken man, known for his jokes. He was also a devoted father who attended every band and sporting event of his daughters, Dottie and Ellen. “Papa,” as he was affectionately called, loved to spend time with kids and was also known as the “baby whisperer” for his ability to help calm the grandkids.



Charlene Adkins

8/30/49 - 4/19/20

Adkins, 70, of Dewitt, was a homemaker born in Wyandotte, death records showed. She loved visiting casinos, playing slot machines and bingo and going out for dinner. Adkins especially enjoyed trips to Mackinaw City, cooking and her big Southern breakfasts. According to her obituary, Adkins’ biggest enjoyment in life was spending time with her eight grandchildren. She is also survived by her three children, great grandchildren and siblings.



Bobbie Jean Hardy

8/20/61 - 4/9/20

Hardy, 58, of Lansing, was born and raised in Shaw, Mississippi, and moved to Lansing in 1998, where she visited many churches and later joined the Greater Lansing Church of God in Christ. For years, she worked as an activity program coordinator at a nursing home and was known to live life to the fullest as one of the kindest, most compassionate and unselfish people one could meet. Friends and family will remember Hardy for her devout commitment to the local Christian community. She left behind five children, five grandchildren, a great grandson and five siblings.



“Bobbie opened her heart and home and touched the hearts of all she came in contact with,” reads Hardy’s obituary. “A light in this dark world has dimmed with her contagious smile gone.”

Lori Ann Price

1/15/62 - 5/21/20

Price, 58, of Williamston, worked as a homemaker, according to death records. An obituary couldn’t be located. A graveside service was held at Antrim Cemetery in Fowlerville last month.



Loretta H. Torres

12/1/43 - 4/21/20

Torres, 76, of Lansing, was born in Lockhart, Texas, moved to Lansing and retired after many years as an automotive production worker at General Motors. She loved to spend time with her eight grandchildren and great grandchildren, and was an avid “Young and the Restless” fan. Every weekend, Torres spent quality time with her brothers and sisters. They each remembered her as a feisty woman and a devout Catholic who fought a grueling medical battle against the coronavirus, among other health issues, until the very end.



Nyabenda Etiyene

1/1/41 - 6/8/20

Etiyene, 79, of Lansing, worked as a construction worker. Funeral records show that a mass will be celebrated at 11 a.m. Thursday (July 2) at Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church in Lansing with a visitation slated for 6-8 p.m. on today at the Palmer, Bush & Jensen funeral home in Lansing. City Pulse couldn’t locate Etiyene’s obituary. Family members also couldn’t be readily identified.

William I. Elem

10/9/45 - 4/23/20

Elem, 74, of Lansing, studied business in college and served in the U.S. Army, retiring from service after 20 years with several medals for good conduct, national defense and a tour in Vietnam. He went on to work in several local government jobs and retired from the Lansing School District, according to his obituary. Death records show that he worked in rehabilitation. Elem loved sports and regularly played golf and tennis. Friends and family said he loved his life as a father, bachelor and golfer and enjoyed traveling, frequently to Florida. He was also responsible and very committed to his daily routines, friends and life, according to his obituary. Friends also remembered his sense of humor, competitiveness, patience and his gentle nature. Elem leaves behind a daughter, four stepchildren, two grandchildren, four sisters, four brothers, 10 nieces, eight nephews and many aunts, uncles, cousins and many other close relatives.



Joanne Ireland

12/3/36 - 5/1/20

Ireland, 83, of Vevay Township, worked as a hairdresser for many years. She loved camping, bowling, tending to her flowers and spending time with her grandkids and great-grandkids. She is survived by her two sons, six grandchildren, five great grandchildren and three siblings. Friends remembered Ireland as a great companion on vacations to Florida and to the casino.



David Ford

6/25/60 - 4/21/20

Ford, 59, of Dewitt, was a former UPS driver and pastor at Friendship House of Prayer Baptist Church on Waverly Road. Bishop David Maxwell told the Lansing State Journal that in his last conversation with Ford, he was grateful to God and ecstatic about returning home from the hospital after contracting COVID-19. Ford was known as a “gentle giant” with a booming voice who preached with a lot of strength and sweat, according to his former church colleagues. Ford is survived by his wife, Cassandra, and his many children, nieces and nephews.



Dena Celeste Elem

3/5/65 - 4/26/20

Elem, 55, of Lansing, was William Elem’s daughter. She died just three days after her father. Elem lived a faithful life. She was raised in a Southern Baptist church and spent several years working as a phone bank teller and in a customer service job at Sparrow Health in Lansing. She was a happy and generous person who loved reading, watching TV, and playing board and card games, according to her obituary. Elem also loved going to concerts, traveling with friends and hosting events — like the annual family Superbowl party. She leaves behind a sister, a niece, a nephew, four aunts, four uncles, 10 cousins and many other relatives and half-siblings.



William Edward Kester

9/13/44 - 5/31/20

Kester, 75, of Bath Township, worked as an auto manufacturing inspector, according to death records. Funeral listings show his arrangements are incomplete. An obituary couldn’t be found.

Marsha Ann VanBuren 3/31/48 - 4/26/20

VanBuren, 72, of Lansing, was born in Lansing and worked as a cook for Ramon's Restaurant for 25 years. She enjoyed crocheting, crossword puzzles, spending quality time with friends and was always quick to volunteer to take care of the baies and help put them to bed. For nearly the past year, VanBuren was living at Regency West and made many friendships there. Surviving her are a sister, three brothers and several nieces, nephews and close friends.

"She had the best stories about her brothers and I thoroughly enjoyed her company," a former health care provider remembered. "She was always working on an Afghan or amazing projects."



James Edward Marable 11/10/41 - 3/27/20

Marable, 78, of Delhi Township, is the only COVID-19 patient in Ingham County to have died at his home. City Pulse couldn't find an obituary online, and we didn't have much luck contacting his family, but some posted remembrances online. Elise Bates said he was a wonderful blessing to his family. Others remembered Marable as a soft-spoken Christian man, known for a deep love for his wife, Lena, his snazzy clothing and a refusal to be a stranger to anyone who knew him. Marable's arrangements were handled by the Paradise Funeral Chapel in Lansing.

Bishop Nathaniel Edwards Sr. 3/21/36 - 5/7/20

Edwards, 84, of Lansing, was a bishop at the Apostolic Tower of Power Temple Church on Mount Hope Avenue in Lansing for more than 40 years. He's the father of the Rev. J. Anthony Edwards Sr., pastor of The Rock Church of Worship in East Lansing and, according to death records, worked for a time as a carpenter. Edwards moved his family from Detroit to Lansing, where he and his son — among his other children — provided fiery sermons to the Lansing community for decades. City Pulse couldn't locate Edwards' obituary and was unable to contact his family members. His daughter, Natalie James, died less than two weeks later, also from COVID-19 complications.



Janenne Evelyn Grinnell 10/5/33 - 5/13/20

Grinnell, 86, of Delta Township, was born in Kalamazoo, loved people and was known to be happiest when helping others. She was a Cub Scout den mother and worked with Girl Scouts. And for 25 years, Grinnell gave her heart to children with auditory disabilities as an interpreter at the Lansing School District. She was also known to be active at Calvary Lutheran and Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran churches, freely sharing her time with both ministries. Grinnell also enjoyed spending time with her grandchildren, quilting, arts and crafts, camping, traveling, reading, gardening, games, spending cold winters in Alabama and talking with others. Her friends and family will remember her contagious laugh and her loving and giving spirit. She leaves behind three children, a son-in-law, 10 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.



Carolyn Jean Wortman 6/13/43 - 4/30/20

Wortman, 76, of Mason, was a Holt High School graduate and longtime employee of General Motors, starting her career on the assembly line and retiring as a blueprint operator. She liked to read, do puzzles, shop and spend time with her family, including her late husband, Roger. Wortman spent winters in Texas and summers in Michigan. She will be lovingly remembered by her two daughters, one brother, two stepsons, seven grandchildren and five great grandchildren. "She never placed herself in front of the line and was always thinking of everyone else," a friend remembered. "I enjoyed our political conversations, love of life, candor, and her off the wall sense of humor. I will miss her terribly, but also have many fine memories to help fill the void."



Jeanne Theresa Zubiena 7/3/28 - 5/4/20

Zubiena, 91, of East Lansing, worked as a secretary, according to her death certificate. City Pulse couldn't find an obituary and didn't have luck contacting her surviving family. A memorial mass will be held at 10 a.m. July 10 at St. Martha Church on Grand River Avenue in Okemos. Her husband, James Zubiena, died less than two weeks later from COVID-19 complications.

James Dominick Zubiena 5/6/28 - 5/15/20

Zubiena, 92, of East Lansing, worked as a highway engineer, according to his death certificate. He died from COVID-19 complications less than two weeks after his wife, Jeanne Theresa Zubiena. An obituary couldn't be located. A memorial mass will be held at 10 a.m. July 10 at St. Martha Church, 1100 W. Grand River Ave. in Okemos, according to a recent online bulletin.

Jo Kun Forest 2/3/30 - 5/14/20

Forest, 90, of Alaiedon Township, was born in South Korea and came to the United States in 1971, becoming a citizen in 1977. She retired from Michigan State University after 15 years and later worked as a housekeeper, records showed. Friends and family said Forest led an extraordinary life, having survived both WWII and the Korean War. Her strong family bonds were the center of her life. Forest enjoyed cooking authentic Korean food and finding things to do at home. She was also known to spoil her grandchildren and great-grandchildren with gifts. Her family said they enjoyed her dry sense of humor and admired her strength and determination. Forest is survived by a brother, daughter, two granddaughters and four great granddaughters.



Brian Lee VanDerBos 4/19/43 - 4/7/20

VanDerBos, 76, of Delta Township, was a 1961 graduate of Lansing Eastern High School and retired from General Motors, where he worked as an electrician. In his free time, he enjoyed hunting, fishing, golfing and relaxing with his family. VanDerBos is survived by one son, one brother and many nieces, nephews and their families, along with many other dear friends.

Virginia Elizabeth Wilbanks 6/4/29 - 5/6/20

Wilbanks, 90, of Williamston, is remembered by her brother, Jim, for her spontaneity and her commitment to God. According to her obituary, Wilbanks was open to anything — except German food at Frankenmuth: She would only eat the chicken strips, Jim remembered. Wilbanks worked as a clerk at Kmart and also took missionary trips to South Texas and Mexico. Kelly Gable remembers taking road trips with "Grandma Jenny" and singing the entire time. She also said her Wilbanks will be remembered for being sweet, kind, funny, always laughing and willing to share her life experiences. Wilbanks was also a devout Christian, Gable posted online. "She was a very talented lady. Quite an artist! I shall always treasure our ceramic class together," posted Kathy Anderson. "Aunt Jenny has a great sense of humor. In fact, her alter ego was Bobo the Clown. Many children learned of God's love listening to stories Bobo the Clown shared with them. I love you, Aunt Jenny! Give Uncle John and my Mama a hug for me."



Marcella Jean Jones 1/16/29 - 5/17/20

Jones, 91, of Meridian Township, was born in Chicago and lived in Flint before moving to Lansing and later Okemos, where she lived for the last 40 years with her husband, Ronald. She also enjoyed time spent at their home in Bradenton, Florida and their cottage in Cadillac. Jones volunteered as an active member of St. Thomas Aquinas Church and also enjoyed traveling, antiquing and crafting. Records show she worked as a manager at an optometry office. Jones was immensely proud of her family and leaves behind many, beautiful memories. She is survived by five children, nine grandchildren and two great grandchildren, among others.



Natalie Lorraine James 8/2/58 - 5/20/20

James, 61, of Lansing, was born and raised in Detroit and later obtained a business degree from Lansing Community College. She was an entrepreneur and was pursuing a degree in early childhood education while she worked at Burcham Hills Assisted Living in East Lansing this year. James previously owned and managed a daycare in Georgia and was a member of several congregations before she was ordained into the ministry at a church in Georgia. She was the daughter of Bishop Nathaniel Edwards Sr., who died from COVID-19 complications last month. "Natalie led with divine guidance all those who touched her life and with saint-like determination she became an example of leadership, family values, living life with a purpose, and selfless sacrifice to everyone she encountered," her obituary reads. James leaves behind four children, six grandchildren, 12 siblings and a host of relatives.



Andres Luis Salas Jr. 8/25/52 - 5/13/20

Salas, 67, of Dimondale, lived a fulfilling life as a devoted son, loving father to two children and caring brother to 16 siblings. He enjoyed writing poetry, cooking and he loved nature; wildlife, walks, plants and rivers. According to death records, he worked locally as a car salesman. His family said those wishing to honor Salas' life can make a donation to Footprints of Michigan.